

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 08542 141957Z
ACTION NEA-10

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R 141548Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 929
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
DIA WASHDC

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 8542

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJECT: REPORTED COUP AGAINST ASAD REGIME ALLEGEDLY FORESTALLED

1. REGULAR SOURCE REPORTED CONVERSATION WITH FORMER HIGH-RANKING SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICER WHO PASSED ALONG DETAILS OF PLANNED COUP ATTEMPT IN EARLY DECEMBER AGAINST ASAD REGIME BY GROUP OF MILITARY OFFICERS APPARENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH PREVIOUS STRONGMAN SALAH JADID. SOURCE TOLD BY HIS CONTACT THAT GROUP OF OFFICERS, MAJORITY OF WHOM ALAWITE, HAD BEEN PLANNING COUP BUT THEIR ORGANIZATION UNCOVERED WITH ASSISTANCE OF CONSPIRATOR WHO LEAKED DETAILS TO AUTHORITIES. ORGANIZATION LOCATED IN HOMS. CONTACT TOLD SOURCE THAT COUP ATTEMPT TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH VISIT BY PRES. ASAD TO SOME MILITARY UNITS FIRST DAY OF DEC. 2 'ID AL-ADHA HOLIDAY. CONTACT IMPLIED THAT CONSPIRATORS ALSO AWAITING "SIGNAL" FROM NORTH; SOURCE HERE SPECULATED HIS CONTACT MAY HAVE MEANT STAGED MILITARY OR CIVILIAN DISORDER IN CITY SUCH AS ALEPPO.

2. SOURCE ASKED HIS CONTACT WHO WAS BEHIND INCIDENT. HE REPLIED THAT IBRAHIM MAKHUS, SALAH JADID AND THEIR SUPPORTERS. (JADID STILL HOUSED IN MEZZE PRISON, SO WE PRESUME CONTACT SPEAKING METAPHORICALLY. MAKHUS, TO BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, REMAINS IN EXILE IN ALGERIA BUT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 08542 141957Z

MAINTAINS CONTACT WITH ALAWITE COMMUNITY.) SOURCE WAS

TOLD THAT FORTY OFFICERS HAVE "DISAPPEARED," PRESUMABLY ARRESTED.

3. REPORTS OF SOMETHING MAJOR HAVING HAPPENED IN HOMS OVER "ID AL-ADHA HAVE BEGUN TO SURFACE FROM OTHER SOURCES. ACCORDING TO WELL-PLACED LOCAL JOURNALIST, LEADER OF PLOTTERS WAS A COLONEL OR BRIGADIER NAQAB OR NAQAL (PHON), ABOUT WHOM NEITHER HE NOR WE HAVE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION. ALSO, EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE FROM ALEPPO SAID HE HAD HEARD ACCOUNT VERY SIMILAR TO THAT IN PARAS 1-2 EXCEPT THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD SOME 200 OFFICERS, ALL MAJORS AND BELOW, HAD BEEN INVOLVED. FSL ADDED THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE UMRAN FACTION OF THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY HAD BEEN APPROACHED RE JOINING THE JADIDISTS BUT HAD DECIDED TO INFORM ASAD INSTEAD.

4. COMMENT. TENSIONS WITHIN ALAWITE COMMUNITY, STEMMING FROM COMPETING INTERESTS OF VARIOUS CLANS, HAVE IN THE PAST FOUND ECHOES IN THE ALAWITE COMPONENT OF THE OFFICER CORPS. ASAD'S OWN ROAD WAS PAVED WITH HIS SUCCESSES OVER ALAWITE OPPONENTS, NOTABLY JADID AND MUHAMMAD UMRAN. LATEST MANIFESTATION OF DISCONTENT SUGGESTS THAT ASAD'S SUCCESSES IN PACIFYING LEBANON AND PATCHING UP HIS QUARREL WITH SADAT HAVE NOT ENDED DOMESTIC CHALLENGES TO HIS POSITION. WE EARLIER REPORTED COMMENTS BY SYRIAN DISSIDENT HAMOUD SHOEFI (DAMASCUS 7896) THAT JADID ELEMENTS IN MILITARY WERE TRYING TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH UMRAN OFFICERS BUT HAD BEEN REBUFFED. UNCOVERING OF LATEST CONSPIRACY WITHIN OFFICER CORPS DEMONSTRATES ASAD'S ABILITY TO FEND OFF THRUSTS BY HIS OPPOSITION BUT ALSO SERVES NOTICE ON HIM THAT HE NEEDS PAY MORE ATTENTION TO MENDING HIS POLITICAL FENCES AMONG FELLOW ALAWITES. AS HIS PRE-OCCUPATION WITH LEBANON DIMINISHES, WE ASSUME ASAD WILL INCREASINGLY TURN HIS ATTENTION TO RESOLVING INTERNAL TENSIONS WHICH HIS CONCENTRATION ON LEBANESE AFFAIRS MAY HAVE ALLOWED TO DEVELOP.
MURPHY

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